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SUBJECT: UNITED FRONT ON POLITICAL DECENTRALIZATION

¶1. (SBU) United Front Spokesman Hussain Sangcharaki recently elaborated on his political bloc's hope of transitioning to a parliamentary system if it wins the 2009 presidential election. While acknowledging Afghanistan's democratic achievements since the Taliban's ouster, Sangcharaki argued the current presidential system too easily allows a single ethnic group to dominate the country. Karzai, he claimed, has systematically used the presidency to favor Pashtuns. Sangcharaki emphasized he did not blame the president personally for this. He said Afghanistan's security uncertainties, governmental tradition and culture would predispose any leader towards husbanding power primarily among members of his own ethnic group.

¶2. (SBU) Sangcharaki contends a parliamentary system and elected provincial governors, district administrators and mayors would counter this predisposition and forestall resentment among non-Pashtun ethnic groups by offering them more political opportunities than the winner-takes-all 2004 Constitution. He disagreed with the contention that a more decentralized system would encourage provincial fiefdoms. He asserted an empowered parliament would give ethnic groups more influence in central government decision-making, reinforcing provincial and local leaders' connection to the capital. Sangcharaki promised the United Front would encourage that orientation by maintaining budgetary control in Kabul, though residing in an empowered National Assembly rather than with the president.

¶3. (SBU) According to Sangcharaki, the United Front would follow a 2009 presidential win immediately with a Loya Jirga "to amend" the constitution. Prominent among likely amendments would be the transfer of executive authority to a new office of the prime minister from the presidency, which would be relegated to a largely ceremonial role. The Prime Minister would appoint his cabinet subject to lower house review and approval.

¶4. (SBU) Neither Sangcharaki nor other United Front leaders appear to have gamed out fully the possible consequences of their radical decentralization ambitions. Sangcharaki was stymied by our inquiry as to how the United Front proposes to restrict the focus of a constitutional Loya Jirga. In theory, once convened, a Loya Jirga could become a tool of the more numerous Pashtun, who may be inclined to restore the hegemony they had enjoyed for more than two centuries.

